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Dear Business Committee

## **Review of Petitions Process – Consideration of changes to Standing Order 23 – Public Petitions**

At its meeting on 20 October 2025 the Committee held private discussions on the current petitions process and arrangements, and considered practice elsewhere. This was with a view to making any recommendations in advance of the Seventh Senedd. The Committee agreed to request that the Business Committee considers the following possible changes to Standing Order 23.

### **1. Standing Order 23.1 - status of the committee**

Standing Order 23.1 requires the functions set out in that Standing Order regarding public petitions to be assigned to “a committee or committees”, but does not require a dedicated “Petitions Committee” to be established. Members noted the possibility that even in a larger Senedd of 96 Members there might be pressure to include the function of handling petitions within the remit(s) of other Committees. They discussed whether it was preferable to recommend that the Seventh Senedd committee structure should include a separate standing committee with a dedicated function of handling petitions, or to retain the status quo in Standing Orders which allows greater flexibility for deciding arrangements for handling petitions.

In reaching a decision the Committee noted that the Scottish Parliament’s equivalent Standing Orders are very brief, but require a dedicated committee, the remit of which can be expanded by a motion of its Bureau (equivalent to the Business Committee):

#### ***Rule 6.10 Public Petitions***

*1. There shall be a committee, the remit of which is to consider public petitions addressed to the Parliament in accordance with these Rules (and any additional matter added under Rule 6.1.5A) and, in particular, to—*

- (a) decide in a case of dispute whether a petition is admissible;
- (b) decide what action should be taken upon an admissible public petition; and
- (c) keep under review the operation of the petitions system.

## **Proposal**

The Committee agreed to submit a formal proposal to the Business Committee to amend Standing Order 23.1 before the end of the Sixth Senedd to better reflect the expectation that one committee will have a dedicated lead role in handling public petitions. This proposal would not exclude that committee from also having other functions within its remit.

## **Rationale**

Petitions Committee Members are strongly of the view that it is important for petitioners to have a dedicated Petitions Committee they can directly engage with. Responses to a targeted consultation with public bodies in Wales over summer recess highlighted the value of the current petitions process. The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales said: *"We strongly believe in the value of the petitions process in strengthening citizen's voice and influence over public policy"*, and the Welsh NHS Confederation noted *"the Petitions Committee fulfils an essential role in our country's democracy. It is important that all Welsh citizens have the opportunity to voice their concerns if they have issues with the actions of any public body."* This was a view shared by Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board: *"the work of the Committee is an important and established plank of Welsh democratic life."* Members also note that there can be instances where a dedicated committee is able to give more attention to a particular issue than a specialist policy committee, for example because of other scrutiny commitments.

If the Business Committee is minded to consider this proposal in more detail, with a view to any agreed changes being put in place before the start of the Seventh Senedd, the attached Annex A sets out the changes the Committee would envisage being necessary.

## **2. Standing Orders 23.4-23.10 – Explaining Admissibility and Action on a petition**

Currently 'admissibility' of a petition is described (in SO 23.4(i)) as including a petition containing no fewer than 250 signatures. Historically this signature threshold has been considered the final admissibility criteria, and the trigger point at which it is referred for 'Action on a petition' under SO23.8 (Committee consideration).

In real practice, a petition is described to a petitioner as being 'admissible' for publication in the online system and open for signatures when it has met the other criteria set out in Standing Orders 23.2-23.4 - i.e. it complies with the rules; is in proper form; is not offensive; and is within Senedd competence.

It is also proposed to update the wording in 23.7 which describes how decisions on admissibility are recorded and petitioners informed. In practice, now that the petitions system is fully online, the rationale for rejecting a petition as inadmissible is recorded for that individual petition, and the lead petitioner is automatically informed by email. The online system constitutes a 'record'

of decisions rather than forming a 'register'. The amendment is proposed for clarity, and reflects existing practice in other parts of the Standing Orders.

### **3. Standing Orders 23.11-23.12 – Closing Petitions**

Petitioners can sometimes be confused by the difference between their petition being 'closed' for signatures, and being 'closed' by the Committee following its consideration by Members. Amending the title in the Standing Order to 'Closing *consideration of* Petitions' would provide greater clarity.

#### **Proposal**

Clerks have considered the current wording of Standing Order 23, and propose that in light of developed practice it might be better amended to more clearly outline the stages of considering admissibility; referring a petition on for Committee consideration; and deciding to close a petition that has been under consideration. The suggested amendments to achieve this are set out at Annex A.

#### **Rationale**

The proposed changes would improve clarity for petitioners and better reflect established practice.

#### **Presiding Officer's Determination on the Proper Form of Petitions**

For your awareness, the Committee also considered the current wording of the Determination on the Proper Form of Petitions, and agreed to propose some minor updates to improve clarity for petitioners. As the Determination is a matter for you as Llywydd, and not related to your role as Chair of the Business Committee, clerks will provide you with advice on this separately.

I look forward to the Business Committee's response to the proposals for possible changes to Standing Order 23.

If you have any queries, please contact the Committee clerking team.

Yours Sincerely,



**Carolyn Thomas MS**

**Chair**

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



**Senedd Cymru**  
**Welsh Parliament**

## **STANDING ORDER 23 – Public Petitions**

### **Committee or Committees**

- 23.1 In proposing the remits of committees under Standing Order 16.2 or 16.3, the Business Committee must ensure that responsibility for the functions in Standing Order 23 is assigned to a committee ~~or committees~~ (referred to within Standing Order 23 as “the responsible committee”).

### **Form of Petitions**

- 23.2 A petition must clearly indicate:
- i. the name of the petitioner, who may be an individual person (other than a Member) resident in Wales, or a body corporate or an unincorporated association of persons with a base in Wales;
  - ii. an address of the petitioner to which all communications concerning the petition should be sent; and
  - iii. the names and addresses of any person supporting the petition.
- 23.3 The Presiding Officer must determine the proper form of petitions and must publish his or her determinations.

### **Admissibility of Petitions**

- 23.4 A petition is not admissible if it:
- ~~i. contains fewer than 250 signatures;~~
  - i. fails to comply with Standing Order 23.2 or is otherwise not in proper form;
  - ~~iii.~~ii. contains language which is offensive;
  - ~~iv.~~iii. requests the Senedd to do anything which the Senedd clearly has no power to do; or
  - ~~v.~~iv. is the same as, or substantially similar to, a petition which was closed less than a year earlier.
- 23.5 *[Standing Order removed by resolution in Plenary on 8 March 2017]*
- 23.6 The Presiding Officer must consider and decide in a case of dispute whether a petition is admissible and must notify the petitioner, as soon as is reasonably practicable, of his or her decision and the reasons for it.
- 23.7 The Presiding Officer must publish a ~~register~~record of decisions made under Standing Order 23.6. *[It is proposed to replace the word ‘register’ with ‘record’ to better reflect current practice. NB: The Conduct Order also uses the word ‘record’ for similar instances.]*

### **Action on a Petition**



23.8 If a petition is admissible, and reaches the threshold for consideration, the Presiding Officer must refer that petition to the responsible committee. The threshold for consideration by the responsible committee is 250 signatures.

23.9 The responsible committee must:

- i. refer the petition to the government, any other committee of the Senedd or any other person or body for them to take such action as they consider appropriate;
- ii. report to the Senedd; or
- iii. take any other action which the committee considers appropriate.

23.10 The responsible committee must notify the petitioner of any action taken under Standing Order 23.9.

## **Closing Consideration of Petitions**

23.11 The responsible committee may close consideration of a petition at any time.

23.12 When the responsible committee closes a petition, it must notify the petitioner that the petition is closed and of the reasons for closing it.